

SHORT FACT SHEET—NAMIBIA’S RHINO MANAGEMENT SUCCESS

- Namibia has recovered its black rhino population to be the largest in the world, numbering 1,946 individuals in 2015.¹ This population is assessed as “Vulnerable” by the IUCN *Red List*, and will likely be down-listed to “Near Threatened” within the next year as the population has been increasing consistently for twenty years and has had over 1,000 adults for over five years (the *Red List* standard).²
- **Conservation Strategy:** Namibia manages its black rhino population pursuant to a Black Rhino Management Strategy, which was updated in 2009 and again this year.³ This strategy is based on recommendations from the foremost black rhino experts, including the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group. It identifies three primary goals: (1) expanding available range, (2) growing the population at least 5% per year, and (3) minimizing poaching. It also focuses on participation and empowerment of rural communities. Namibia, under the management of the Ministry of Environment (“MET”), has been achieving each of these goals.
- **Expanding Range:** Under Namibian law, all black rhino are national property. Most (approximately 65%) inhabit National Parks. Under the management strategy, black rhino may be translocated to communal or private land, which offer five times more potential habitat. In 2009, 400 rhino inhabited communal and private conservancies. That number has grown, expanding the range and population and promoting greater genetic diversity. Translocations are authorized pursuant to custodianship agreements and approved action plans.⁴
- **Population Growth:** Under the strategy, Namibia’s black rhino population more than doubled between 1995 and 2015.⁵ The strategy achieves maximum growth by maintaining rhino populations below the range carrying capacity and skewing the population towards females and young adults through translocation and conservation hunting. Research has shown that removal of a limited number of males reduces in-breeding and stimulates population growth by reducing conflicts⁶ and often fatal competition between old and

¹ African Rhino Specialist Group, Report at the 17th Conference of the Parties to CITES (Sept. 2016), <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/17/WorkingDocs/E-CoP17-68-A5.pdf>.

² Dr. R. Emslie, pers. comm. (2017).

³ FWS, Enhancement Finding for the Import of a Sport-Hunted Black Rhino Trophy from Namibia (Apr. 2015); MET, Black Rhinoceros Management Strategy, version 4 [draft] (Sept. 2017).

⁴ FWS (Apr. 2015).

⁵ African Rhino Specialist Group (Sept. 2016); African Rhino Specialist Group, Letter (Nov. 2013).

⁶ FWS (Apr. 2015) (“The black rhino has a reputation for being extremely aggressive, and charges readily at perceived threats ... Black rhinos will fight each other, and they have the highest rates of mortal combat recorded for any mammal: about 50% of males and 30% of females die from intra-specific, combated-related injuries.”); African Rhino Specialist Group (Nov. 2013) (“From 2007-2011 fighting deaths were the single greatest known cause of known black rhino deaths in Namibia (31%) with females and subadults/calves making up 26.7% and 35% of all fighting deaths respectively.”).

younger males, inducing shorter calving intervals and reducing juvenile mortality. It also corrects the slight natural male bias (53%) in rhino populations.⁷

- **Role of Conservation Hunting:** Regulated hunting is a tool used to increase black rhino population growth rates. Hunting offtakes have no negative population impact, as the potential removal of up to five bulls per year would represent only 0.26% of Namibia's black rhino population, which would be only a fraction of the annual growth rate. But these offtakes promote the removal of "certified" surplus bulls while generating significant revenues to be invested in rhino conservation. According to the chair of the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group: "In population terms, it's of minor significance, as we are talking about one old bull that would have contributed genetically to the rhino population already. In monetary terms, it's important as it generates funds that go directly into the wildlife products fund that feeds 100% back into rhino conservation."⁸
- **Rhino Certification:** MET monitors all black rhino and individually certifies the select few to be hunted. These bulls are over age 25 (quite old for a species that typically lives to about 30), post-reproductive, and almost always problem animals. They are typically killers of other rhino and interfere with younger, breeding bulls, thereby depressing the population growth rate on the property.⁹ (Typically, these older bulls cannot be translocated because they will just start fighting again in the new location.¹⁰) MET rangers accompany the hunter to ensure the correct rhino is taken, and the professional hunter must be licensed by MET for dangerous game.
- **Success of Conservation Hunting:** The success of this strategy speaks for itself. Since 2004, when the CITES Parties approved an export quota of five black rhino/year from both Namibia and South Africa, black rhino populations have increased by 67%, with only 47 black rhino hunted from 2005 to 2015 (most in South Africa).¹¹
- **Anti-Poaching:** The threat of poaching cannot be ignored; however, overall Namibia has successfully kept poaching incidents below the population growth rate. For example, Namibia reduced poaching incidents by over one-third from 2015 to 2016 and by more than two-thirds from 2015 to 2017.¹² Almost all poaching has occurred in Namibia's National

⁷ Dr. M. Knight, Declaration in Case No. 1:15-CV-653 (D.D.C. 2015); African Rhino Specialist Group (Nov. 2013).

⁸ CNN, Texas Hunter Says He Aims to Save Black Rhino (Apr. 18, 2015), <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/07/us/texas-namibia-black-rhino-hunt/index.html>.

⁹ MET, pers. comm. to the FWS (2015, 2017).

¹⁰ African Rhino Specialist Group (Nov. 2013).

¹¹ African Rhino Specialist Group (Sept. 2016). In approving Namibia's export quota, the Parties explicitly recognized that "the financial benefits derived from trophy hunting of a limited number of specimens will benefit conservation of the species directly and provide additional incentives for conservation and habitat protection." Res. Conf. 13.5 (rev. CoP14), <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/document/E-Res-13-05-R14.pdf>.

¹² Reuters, Rhino, Elephant Poaching Declines in Namibia (Oct. 23, 2017), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-namibia-poaching/rhino-elephant-poaching-declines-in-namibia-idUSKBN1CS1WJ> (reflecting a decline in poaching

Parks. Rhino poaching on communal and private land is negligible, as they employ over 3,000 game guards with the revenues from conservation hunting.¹³

- **Funding:** Namibia's anti-poaching success is largely due to the resources available from conservation hunting. All black rhino hunting permit fees are deposited into the Game Products Trust Fund,¹⁴ and ring-fenced to be used only for black rhino protection and management. For example, the \$350,000 received from a widely-publicized 2015 black rhino hunt was invested in law enforcement training and equipment, an early warning anti-poaching system, and a rhino survey in Etosha National Park.¹⁵ U.S. hunters are the largest contributors to this Trust Fund.
- **Community Empowerment:** Rural communities are an integral component of Namibia's rhino management strategy. Through translocations, communities benefit from black rhino-related tourism. If MET certifies a rhino bull on a conservancy, the community will also benefit directly from the hunting revenues. Communities generally benefit from conservation hunting through job creation, game meat distributions, and hunting revenues that are largely reinvested in conservancy management. A 2015 study found conservation hunting is fundamental to Namibia's rural conservancy system. Analysis of data from 77 conservancies (1998 to 2013) illustrated that over half benefit from hunting revenues alone, and without these revenues, ***almost all communal conservancies in Namibia would be unable to cover their operating costs.***¹⁶ This would put approximately 60,000 km² of wildlife habitat at risk.
- **International Recognition:** The IUCN Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group and the African Rhino Specialist Group each wrote in support of the 2014 auction of a black rhino hunt in the U.S. as the best way to maximize the benefits of the sustainable use of black rhino. Previously, the WWF wrote in support of the first positive enhancement finding made by the FWS. The FWS has made a scientific determination that the regulated hunting is not detrimental and "enhances" the survival of Namibia's black rhino.¹⁷

Rebuttals:

- **Myth:** Black rhino in Namibia are "critically endangered." **Response:** Namibia's southwestern black rhino have been assessed as "Vulnerable," two steps down from

incidents from 95 in 2015 to 60 in 2016 and only 2017 as of the end of October 27); Namibian Assn. of CBNRM Support Organizations ("NACSO"), The State of Community Conservation (2017), <http://www.nacso.org.na/>.

¹³ IUCN Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group, Letter (Dec. 2013); R. Naidoo, Complementary Benefits of Tourism and Hunting to Communal Conservancies in Namibia (2015), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282940712_Complementary_benefits_of_tourism_and_hunting_to_communal_conservancies_in_Namibia.

¹⁴ This fund was created by statute in 1997, and disbursements must be approved by an appointed Board.

¹⁵ Dr. M. Lindeque, Declaration in Case No. 1:15-CV-653 (D.D.C. 2015).

¹⁶ Naidoo (2015).

¹⁷ FWS, Enhancement from the Import of a Black Rhino Trophy from Namibia (Mar. 2013); FWS (Apr. 2015).

“Critically Endangered,” since 2000 (almost 18 years). They are about to be further down-listed to “Near Threatened” status because of continued population growth and successful management.

- **Myth:** The population is too low to take any rhino. **Response:** The incredibly low offtakes from conservation hunting—a maximum of five post-reproductive males—represent approximately one-quarter of one percent of the country’s black rhino, and are far too low to have any impact on the population. The old rhino have been problem animals that are suppressing local population growth, or worse, have reduced the rhino population themselves by killing cows, calves, or prime breeding bulls, and monopolizing habitat. Their removal is intended to **increase** local population growth. Growth offsets any poaching losses. The revenues from the hunting also provides the most anti-poaching revenue as well as building local community support and protection from poaching.
- **Myth:** The monies that U.S. citizens have paid for black rhino permits are unaccounted for. **Response:** These monies are tracked by MET and the Board of the Game Products Trust Fund. That Board issues annual reports on the use of funds. The FWS has requested deposit records and expenditure information before issuing any enhancement permits.¹⁸
- **Myth:** Photographic tourism could pay these bills instead of hunting. **Response:** It cannot. Rhino hunting is low impact and high value. Photographic tourism is the opposite, and it has not succeeded in much of Namibia, especially the communal conservancies. See Naidoo (2015). Photographic tourism cannot meet the biological needs of this species.

Conclusion:

Both rhino population growth rates and anti-poaching resources should be maximized to further secure and “provide a bigger buffer” from poaching. This can best be done through conservation hunting of black rhino, and particularly when the trophy import is approved by the FWS. Once the FWS issued the first import permit for a black rhino trophy, the trophy fee increased dramatically. The possibility exists for these hunts to generate half-a-million dollars, each, for black rhino protection and conservation. As the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group wrote in support of black rhino hunting in Namibia, “ultimately the greater the revenue that can be raised the more rhino conservation efforts in Namibia can be funded.”¹⁹ This well-regulated and well-managed program strongly enhances the survival of the species.

¹⁸ It is the expenditures of anti-hunters that should be accounted. Two federal courts have failed to find sufficient participation or interest of these organizations to provide federal standing. See *Friends of Animals v. Ashe*, Case No. 1:15-CV-653 (D.D.C. Mar. 2016); *PETA v. Ashe*, Case No. 1:15-CV-600 (E.D. Va. Sept. 2015).

¹⁹ African Rhino Specialist Group (Nov. 2013).